

Class of 2008! Thank you for giving me the honor of speaking to you on this very special day. I won't speak for long, because I saw in the program that I am the final speaker and therefore the only thing standing between you and your diploma, and that is not a good place to be!

You look wonderful by the way. And happy! As you should be. In fact, your happiness is what I would like to talk about today. What business does a diplomat have talking about happiness? Well, first because diplomats are supposed to help solve crises, and in addition to the energy crisis and food crisis and climate change crisis there is a *happiness crisis* in the world today. Also, America's greatest diplomat of all time, Thomas Jefferson, from the Pinewood Class of 1776, was a leading advocate of happiness. Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that everyone has

the unalienable right to life, liberty and the *pursuit of happiness*.

Jefferson would be amazed at how much difficulty people today are having pursuing happiness! According to recent international poll, less than 40 percent of Europeans are happy. In America too, we are dealing with a happiness deficit. The most popular course at Harvard University and other American universities over the past few years is Happiness 101, or similar courses on how to achieve happiness. There is a growing academic field in Happiness Economics and Positive Psychology, all about the pursuit of happiness. As a diplomat committed to helping solve the global Happiness Crisis, I've done some reading on the subject, and I'd like to share with you my observations.

First observation, all the experts agree what is *not* the key to happiness: money. Being rich is nice of course, but to paraphrase Harvard happiness expert Daniel Gilbert, making a million euros a year is like eating baklava, the first one is really satisfying, but after the second and third, you start getting full, and pretty soon you feel a little sick and guilty. So money and baklava are not the answer. Instead, the experts say, the key factors in the pursuit of happiness are family, health and employment. People who have a supportive family situation, good health and a good job are happier than other people. Obviously, you say. But how does that help us find happiness? Most of us are not able to change our families (even if we might want to sometimes!), and we have only limited control over our health, so that leaves employment as the only variable we can work with. Happiness researchers say that what you do

with your life is the single most important factor in determining whether you are going to be happy or not. How do you make the right choice? There is no easy answer, but there are clues.

Two years ago Bill Gates, the CEO of Microsoft, was the world's richest man, worth about 50 billion dollars, which, even when converted to Euros, is a lot of baklava. Mr. Gates and his wife Melinda, however, decided to give away most of their fortune to help promote education and health around the world. Warren Buffet, the second richest man in the world, decided at about the same time to give away most of his billions to five different charitable foundations, including Bill and Melinda Gates' foundation. Why? Probably because it's fun to give away billions of dollars, and it's meaningful. Research shows that people who do good deeds, help other people are themselves more likely to be

happy. Even happier if they enjoy their work, whether as a billionaire donor, a doctor, engineer, artist or diplomat.

As Confucius, a 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Chinese philosopher advised people who aren't happy with their work: "choose a work that you love, and you will never work another day in your life."

That brings me to my second observation: people who reach their goals and find happiness usually have a plan or a vision that helped get them there. The happiness scientists call this "prospection", the act of looking forward purposefully and visualizing the path to where one wants to go. Why is this important? Because unfortunately, we don't have unlimited time to get where we want to go. Think of it this way: living in Greece, your expected life span is about 80 years. Or 700,800 hours, or 42, 048,000 minutes. That

sounds like a lot of minutes, but remember, you've already used up about 10 million of them!!

So you might want to do a little planning about how you want to spend those precious days, hours and minutes you have remaining. It's hard to plan for 22,630 days, so let me suggest a technique to simplify the task. Imagine your entire life, 80 years, squeezed into one 24 hour day. Each hour is, in this scenario, equal to 3 years and four months.

That means, assuming you were born at one minute after midnight, at this very moment, as you are graduating from high school, it's about 5:45AM in your compressed 24 hour life. You're about to wake up and start a very big day -- the rest of your life! At 6AM, the alarm goes off and you're going to have to rush because you're preparing for final exams -- for your first year in college. No time for breakfast,

it's 7am (3 years later) and you're graduating from university (*Summa cum laude*, of course)! But sorry, only 30 minutes to celebrate before you start -- your first job!

Then at 9:00am (you're 30 years old), and congratulations, you're getting married! At 10:00am get ready because you are having -- your first child! 12:00 noon (the day is half over) you turn 40 years old and you've just been promoted to vice president. Bravo, but sorry, at 1:00 pm your job has been outsourced to Bangladesh and you're unemployed.

Don't worry. Be happy. At 3pm your child is graduating from Pinewood. Hopefully he will have a better commencement speaker than you have today! 4pm (53 years old) the Salonika Valley start up company you founded begins selling the first carbon emission-free space shuttle. You donate the proceeds from the sales and Nobel Prize to

the United Nations. Congratulations. You are happy, and you still have eight more hours left in the day!

As the ancient Greeks said “αδράξτε την ημέρα”, Carpe diem, seize the day. If you do, you will be surprised at how much you can get done in one day and how much shorter the path to your goals will seem.

Lastly, in my experience, people who are happy look not only forward but backwards as well. In other words, they remember where they came from and how they arrived. Happy people draw strength and pride not only from the present, but from the memories of the people and institutions that helped them find their way. They also practice what the happiness researchers call “gratitude interventions”, reaching out and thanking people from the near and distant past who have made a difference in their

lives. As graduates of Pinewood you have much to be proud of and much to be thankful for. You are the product of an excellent and unique institution, Pinewood. You are the last class to graduate from these beloved halls, as Pinewood moves to a new home and opens a new chapter in its rich history.

You have had extraordinarily dedicated and talented teachers, like Mr. David Gibson, who is also beginning a new chapter. So be proud of what you have achieved, it will stay with you forever, wherever Pinewood and the Pinewood family may be. Remember who helped you get here and supported your early pursuit of happiness – thank your teachers, your classmates, your director Mary Tsulfa. Thank your parents, who have sacrificed and worked hard to send you to this exceptional institution. Thank the people who have volunteered many hours of their time to help Pinewood

and its students find a new and even better home. Christos Minoudis, Paulina Nikolopoulos, Costas Yiakoumis, George Horozov. Go ahead, make a few "gratitude interventions". And when you can, give back to the school, your time, your support. You'll be happy you did.

Concluding observation. Happiness is a journey not a destination. It's the process of taking and giving back to society, of overcoming one's obstacles and helping others overcome theirs. In my own journey I am grateful to have been part of the Pinewood family and for the honor you have given me today. Thank you for what you have done to help make Pinewood what it is and thank you in advance for what I am confident you will do to make us all proud of you. I wish you the best as you continue your own special journey in the pursuit of happiness.